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OF DEVELOPMENTS IN HUMAN RIGHTS

No. 43, February 9, 1978

AMERICAN REPUBLICS

Argentina

List of 700 Detainees Released. The government released on February 3 a list of slightly over 700 state-of-siege detainees (about 675 of whom are women). All are being held in Devoto prison, a woman's facility in Buenos Aires.

Embassy Buenos Aires reports that a government statement accompanying the list emphasized that it was a presidential initiative taken pursuant to President Videla's Christmas promise to publish the names of some 3,600 executive prisoners. The newspaper, La Opinion, attributed the list and the recent activation of the right of option process (allowing state-of-siege prisoners to petition for exile) to a presidential strategy allegedly adopted after Videla's meeting with President Carter in September 1977.

While recognizing that the Devoto list was probably the easiest to get out because Devoto houses few if any dangerous suspects, Embassy Buenos Aires terms the list "a significant move" forward. (LIMITED OFFICIAL USE, Buenos Aires 0903, February 4.)

INR Comment: The Embassy speculates that the heavy play given to Videla's personal role in publishing the list may have been an attempt to undercut fellow junta member and Navy Commander Massera's efforts to portray himself as the only government figure concerned with human rights abuses. Earlier reporting indicated that Videla decided to divulge the prisoner lists after becoming disgusted with the December kidnappings of individuals connected with the "Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo." (LIMITED OFFICIAL USE)

Haiti

Invitation to the Inter-American Human Rights Commission (IAHRC). On January 29, Haiti invited the IAHRC to visit the country. The visit is expected to take place in early March. (LIMITED OFFICIAL USE, State 027251, February 1.)

INR Comment: The invitation fulfills a promise made during Ambassador Young's visit in August and is in line with

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recent Haitian policy. In September, the government released 104 political prisoners and signed the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights. Haiti's record, however, was marred in late 1977, when para-military forces beat up the publisher of a journal that had been critical of the government. The invitation reaffirms President Duvalier's desire to improve Haiti's human rights reputation. (LIMITED OFFICIAL USE)

EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Indonesia

Newspapers Reopen But Muzzled; Detention of Students Continues. Embassy Jakarta reports that, with one exception, all major newspapers in Jakarta are publishing again after having been closed in late January in the military crackdown on dissent. A Western journalist says the newspapers had to agree to refrain from further publicizing anti-government activities.

In a related development, the chief of staff of Indonesian security, Admiral Sudomo, announced on February 4 that 240 persons (mostly students) are currently under detention in connection with the crackdown. Of these, 70 were arrested in the past week in Jakarta and Bandung in what Sudomo termed a "still developing situation." He said that those detained were being investigated expeditiously and those found innocent would be released immediately. (CONFIDENTIAL, Jakarta 1632, February 6.)

INR Comment: The government continues to show that it will use force to deal with non-violent dissidence. The erstwhile lively press is now effectively muzzled: Indonesia's largest paper, the prestigious Kompas, complained in a lead editorial that it had to accede to the government's conditions because "a person must live first before he can philosophize." (CONFIDENTIAL)

Singapore

Former Editor of Leading Chinese Daily Released From Detention. The former editor of Singapore's leading Chinese newspaper was released from detention on February 1 after having served 5 years without trial on charges of using the newspaper to incite Chinese chauvinism. The government did not require the editor to make the usual confession--recanting past misdeeds and promising to behave in the future. He was placed under a restraining order restricting his travel, however. (CONFIDENTIAL, Singapore 0558, February 3.)

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